

What Training Is  
Depends on Who You Ask

D. M. Kristiansen, B. G. Witmer,  
B. A. Black, and S. L. Burroughs  
US Army Research Institute, Fort Knox Field Unit

Abstract

Repeated in-depth interviews were conducted with all levels of the chain of command in two tank battalions in Europe during a training effectiveness analysis of a tank system. The purpose of the interviews was to describe the state of training in the battalions across a six month time frame. Interviews were conducted with the battalion commanders, all the company commanders, over 80% of the platoon level leaders (platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and tank commanders), over 70% of the crewmen, and over half the mechanics, and maintenance supervisors. The resulting descriptions of the amount of training conducted/received and the nature of that training differed remarkably at three levels of the chain of command when training was rigorously defined and when training was undefined. Implications for data collection and interpretation of field data are drawn.

In October 1982, the Army Research Institute Field Unit at Fort Knox (ARI) conducted in-depth interviews with all levels of the chain of command in an armor battalion in Europe. The research objective was to pilot a method and prototype data collection format for describing the state of training in an operational unit. Project personnel were in the battalion for two weeks which permitted the collection of a large sample: the battalion commander, all the company commanders and first sergeants, over 80% of the platoon level leaders (platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, and tank commanders), over 70% of the crewmen, the battalion maintenance supervisors, and over half the mechanics. Out of these interviews ARI personnel were able to document, in considerable detail, the state of training in the unit as seen by unit members at various points in the chain of command.

How to define "training" for these interviews became an issue during the planning phase. It was decided that a relatively restrictive definition was preferable because it would exclude those activities on the unit training schedule that were mission operations, that is, details, inspections, the conduct of maintenance, physical training, etc. Accordingly, training was defined as "an event whose purpose was to train MOS or Soldier's Manual tasks."

When the team arrived in Europe, the logistics of collecting the data led to a change in the original planning. The ARI researchers did not conduct the interviews of company commanders and first sergeants. These interviews were conducted by members of an accompanying organization. The ARI researchers, remembering long discussions with members of the accompanying organization

concerning the definition of training, assumed that these interviewers used the same definition.

All respondents were asked how much training had taken place in the two week period preceding the data collection period. Company level leaders (commanders and first sergeants) were asked, on the interview forms, to describe training in three different ways: they were asked to estimate the percentage of scheduled training that was actually conducted, to estimate the number of hours of scheduled, unscheduled, individual, and collective training that had actually been administered, and the number of hours of training that they had personally monitored or supervised.

Table 1 displays the results of this line of questioning for scheduled training. The estimates of training conducted were substantially higher among company level leaders than among platoon level leaders and crewmen. Estimates of unscheduled, individual, and collective training showed similar patterns.

TABLE 1			
AVERAGE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF HOURS OF SCHEDULED TRAINING			
ADMINISTERED	COMMANDERS		43
	FIRST SERGEANTS		32
CONDUCTED	PLATOON LEVEL LEADERS		0
	CREWMEN		1

Table 2 shows the percent of respondents that said that "no" scheduled training (zero hours) had been conducted by platoon level leaders or received by crewmen. This discrepancy between commander's estimates and the estimates of platoon level leaders and crewmen could have arisen in two ways; commanders really did have higher estimates or the commanders were including activities in their concept of training that crewmen were not.

TABLE 2			
PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS INDICATING THAT "ZERO" HOURS OF TRAINING HAD BEEN:			
CONDUCTED	COMMANDERS		0
	PLATOON LEVEL LEADERS		75
RECEIVED	CREWMEN		80

When the added interviewers were queried after data collection, the ARI team discovered that they were not aware of the restrictive definition of training and, hence, did not define "training" for commanders and first sergeants. This suggested that the differences between the estimates of training were differences in kind rather than differences in magnitude.

The discrepancy appeared to be a measure of the difference between two conceptions of what constitutes training. When training was not defined, company level leaders were quite willing to include any and all activities on the training schedule (for example, guard, drill and ceremonies, maintenance operations, and other mission operations) as training because they felt that all these activities had training value. Training, for the company level leaders, was something that the unit did; it was a "unit" activity.

At the bottom of the chain of command, however, training is what happens to "individuals." The platoon level leaders and crewmen reported that, essentially, no training in MOS or Soldier's Manual tasks had taken place. Many felt they were not being trained in skills they needed and said that they wanted this training.

Realizing that training in garrison is difficult, and aware of the commonly held opinion that "real" training takes place in the field during exercises, questions were asked regarding training during a recent major field exercise. Unit leaders talked, in general terms, of how much more training was conducted during such exercises as compared to what could be accomplished in garrison. Crewmen had mixed opinions, however. The training that a crewman received depended on what duty position he held. Tank commanders and drivers were occupied, from time to time, when the exercise required them to displace from one position to another. Loaders and gunners, however, went along for the ride. They had nothing to do. No "in the cracks" training took place. Leaders were, of course, totally occupied during the exercise.

Leaders appeared to assume that when they were busy, their men were also busy. By crewmen reports, this was just not the case. In these battalions, leaders had little opportunity to see for themselves what the implementation of the training schedule looked like "on the ground." They were pinned down by an abundance of actions requiring the attention of a commissioned officer, often the commander himself.

The other side of the training coin is, of course, mission activities. Most everyone agreed on what was taking place in the unit during the visit; maintenance, inspections, and details. Unit leaders again differed from crewmen on the extent to which they saw these activities consuming duty time. Company level leaders saw maintenance and de-

TABLE 3  
NON-TRAINING ACTIVITIES  
(AVERAGE NUMBER OF RESPONSES)

	CREWMEN	PLT LEVEL LEADERS	CO LEVEL LEADERS
MAINTENANCE	0.7	1.2	2.0
INSPECTIONS	0.7	0.2	0.2
DETAILS	0.3	0.5	0.8

tails as all consuming missions. The team was continually directed to the motor pool because "everyone is down there working on the tanks." Often, when the team arrived in the motor pool, it was essentially empty. For the unit leaders, maintenance was a vital mission. The unit was standing down from a major exercise and preparing for a major inspection. The leaders were concerned with insuring that the unit passed the inspection. They spent much of the two week period "managing the process of" preparing for this inspection. Requirements from higher headquarters and routine actions requiring their personal attention kept them from doing much "in the motor pool" supervision. Table 3 shows the extent to which respondents reported being involved in maintenance, inspections, and details. Entries in the Table are the average number of responses within respondent and mission categories. Platoon level leaders who were closer to what was actually happening in the unit reported somewhat less involvement in maintenance and details. Crewmen, who were the performers of these maintenance and detail activities, reported still less involvement.

This data collection experience suggests that "training conducted" and "training received" are quite different. If one has the task of determining, by questionnaire or interview, what training activities are occurring in a unit, a careful definition is in order. Had the team not defined training carefully for platoon level leaders and crewmen, they may have come away with an interpretation vastly different from what they did. They certainly would not have found out that no training in MOS of Soldier's Manual tasks was taking place.

Second and third visits to Europe in 1983 provided an opportunity to determine if these differences were really differences in kind or magnitude. This actually became necessary because the definition of training used by ARI in the October 1982 visit came under considerable criticism by military personnel. They objected to the restrictive definition of training and asked that, during a visit to the battalion and a sister unit in April 1983, ARI purposely did not define training for respondents. The idea was to see if the results obtained during the first visit were dependent on training being rigorously defined. There was a feeling that if the term "training" were left undefined, the responses given across different levels of command would be more homogeneous.

Table 4 shows that, essentially, the same results were obtained. Commanders reported more time devoted to training than platoon level leaders who, in turn, reported more training than crewmen. The differences are not as marked but still suggest different views of the training world at two relatively close points in the chain of command.

Representatives of the different levels of the chain of command also differed in what training they said had taken place during preparation for a major tank unit exercise - Level I Gunnery. For example, Table 5 shows that commanders reported that their units had conducted Tank Crew Proficiency Course and Tank Crew Gunnery Skills Test exercises prior to Level I Gunnery. Few crewmen reported taking part in such exercises. Observations during the conduct of a Tank Crew Proficiency Course illustrated the problem. The company commander and all six platoon leaders and platoon sergeants were present at the exercise. Fewer than half the crewmen in the unit were present, however, because of guard duties and other details and the normal, day-to-day functions that pull men from a unit.

The implications of these findings seem clear. The perspective of the respondent must be clearly defined when designing interview formats and interpreting interview data and the perspective of one level of the chain of command cannot be assumed for any other level. Data collection at only one point in the chain of command, or at two points closely related (i.e., battalion and company), will yield a biased picture of what is actually going on. Commanders respond in terms of unit involvement. Unit involvement does not necessarily imply the involvement of sizable numbers of men. Soldiers respond in terms of what has happened to them. Both perspectives are necessary to

TABLE 4  
HOURS DEVOTED TO TRAINING  
(LAST TWO WEEKS)

	CDRS	PLT LEVEL LEADERS	CREWMEN
UNIT SPENT IN TRAINING	25		
SPENT SUPERVISING TRAINING	20		
SPENT INSTRUCTING		16	
SPENT IN TRAINING			13

TABLE 5  
PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING TRAINING  
EXERCISES IN PREPARATION FOR LEVEL I GUNNERY

	CDRS	PLT LEVEL LEADERS	CREWMEN
NO TRAINING	0	17	22
TANK CREW PROFICIENCY COURSE	87	29	13
TANK CREW GUNNERY SKILLS TEST	62	23	0
MINI-TANK RANGE	37	8	0
CREW DRILLS	37	8	0

accurately describe the state of training in a unit. And, of course, the interview referent must also be carefully defined (or undefined) for all levels of the chain of command.

